

Fort Dodge, Iowa

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FORT DODGE, IOWA.*

Latitude 42° 38'; Longitude 17° 01' W. Wash. A United States fort, situated on the Des Moines River near the junction of the Lizzard Fork, in what is now Webster county, Iowa, the site of the present town of Fort Dodge.

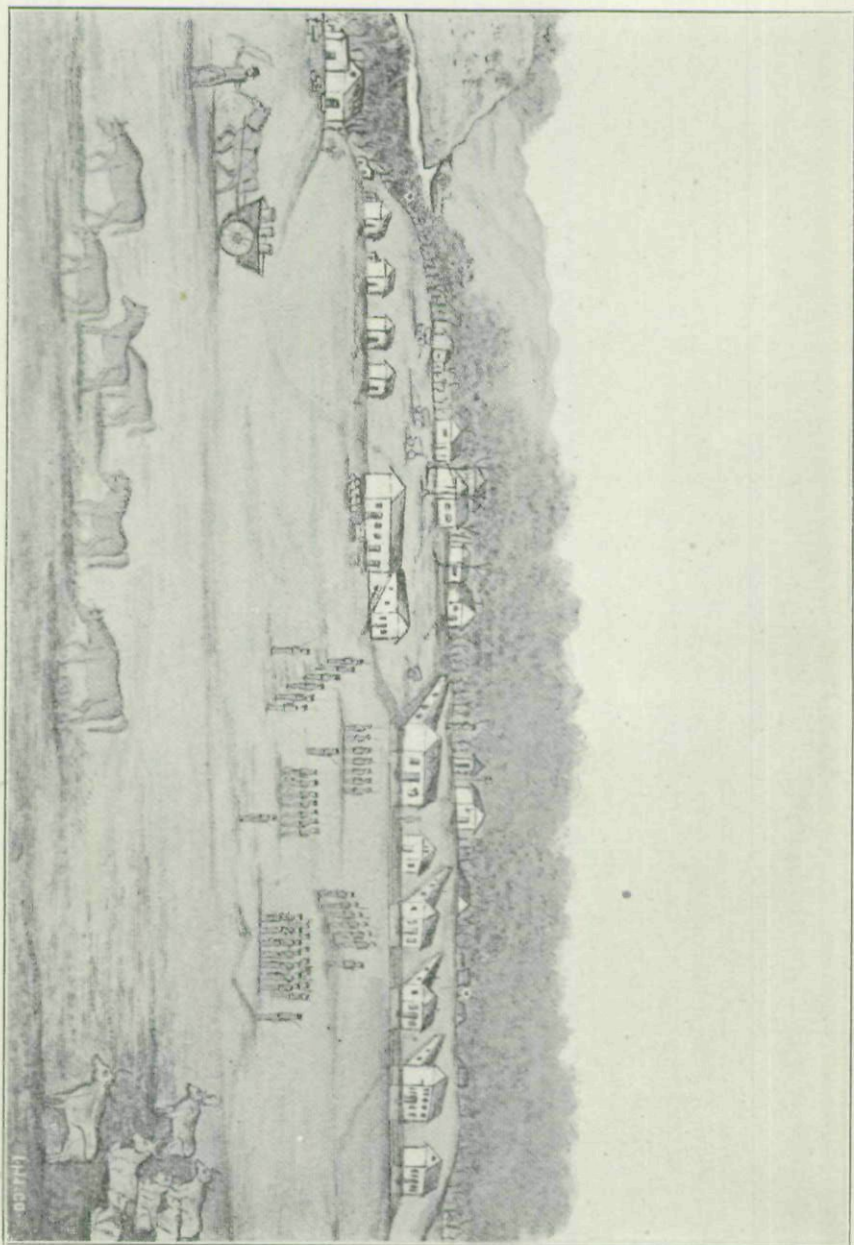
The establishment of a military post at this point was the result of a petition of the citizens of Boone county, Iowa, to the U. S. Senate and House of Representatives, praying that a post be established somewhere on the Des Moines River at or about the Lizzard Forks, for their better security against the Indians, and for the encouragement of settlers. By General Orders No. 19, War Department, Adjutant General's Office, 31 May, 1850, it was ordered:

For the protection of the frontier settlements of Iowa, a new post will be established under the direction of the Commander of the 6th Department, on the east bank of the Des Moines, opposite the mouth of Lizzard Fork; or preferably, if an equally eligible site can be found, at some point twenty-five or thirty miles higher up the Des Moines. The post will be established by a company of the 6th Infantry to be drawn from Fort Snelling, which will for the present constitute its garrison.

This order was supplemented by Orders No. 22, Headquarters 6th Military Department, St. Louis, Mo., 14 July, 1850, which directed that:

In pursuance of General Orders No. 19, current series, from the War Department, Brevet Major Woods 6th Infantry, will select a suitable site in the state of Iowa, near the mouth of the Lizzard Fork of the Des Moines river, for the establishment of a military post; which with his company E, 6th Infantry, he will proceed to construct and garrison, without however, withdrawing his personal attention from the duty of removing Indians, on which he is now specially engaged. A military reserve eight

*This article completes the series of historical sketches of Iowa Forts which has been appearing in the pages of this magazine. It was prepared at the Adjutant General's Office, War Department, Washington, D. C. The statements relating to each of our pioneer military establishments have for the most part been drawn from official sources and may, therefore, be accepted as correct. Brief as these sketches are, they include every important fact that is at present accessible. Other sources of information may come to light hereafter. In most cases we have been able to present an engraving, showing the old "fort" as it appeared when it was an important center, alive with the din of military activity. At this time, with the exception of one or two rough buildings at Fort Atkinson, scarcely a vestige of one of them is left to mark the spot where it stood. Indeed, the locations of some of them were long ago built over within the limits of thriving cities. But what they were in the old days may be learned from the pages of this work.—EDITOR OF THE ANNALS.



FORT DODGE IN 1862. FROM A PENCIL SKETCH BY THE LATE MAJ. WILLIAM WILLIAMS.

miles in length (four miles above the post, and four below) along the river, and two miles in depth on either side, will be marked off and appropriated exclusively to the present use of the Government. The proper Staff Departments will forthwith provide the stores and supplies necessary in the construction of the post on the Des Moines, and for the subsistence and temporary shelter of the garrison.

Immediately on receipt of this Order at Fort Snelling, Captain Samuel Woods with his Company E of the 6th Infantry, two officers and sixty-six men who were then in the field, broke camp and proceeded to the point designated, where they arrived on the second of August, 1850, and established a post, which they named *Fort Clarke*, in honor of Brevet Brigadier General Newman S. Clarke, Colonel 6th Infantry, then commanding the 6th Military Department. According to Prof. Tuttle (*History of Iowa*, 1876) the first encampment was on the ground now lying between the public square and Walnut street, between Fourth and Fifth streets, in the present town of Fort Dodge. Materials for building the necessary quarters for the troops were at once prepared and their construction so rapidly pushed forward that by the first of December they were in a condition for occupancy. Early in the spring of 1851, we find Major Woods urging upon the War Department the necessity of establishing a postoffice at the fort, around which settlers were commencing to congregate and recommending Mr. William Williams, the post trader, as a suitable person to assume its charge. During the session of Congress of 1850-51 we find the merchants of Dubuque petitioning for the building of a road from their town to Fort Clarke, but beyond an estimate of the topographical engineers of the approximate cost of such a road, no action seems to have been had in the matter during the lifetime of the post.

Correspondence between the fort and the authorities at St. Louis and Washington appears to have been limited to mere requisitions for supplies, the rendition of statistical returns, and such formal reports as afford little information regarding the events of this occupation, none of which seem

to have been at all removed from the ordinary career of an extreme frontier post. It was regarded at no time more than a temporary post, although, as was customary, in all such establishments, and as set forth in the order already cited, a reservation was laid off with the flag-staff of the fort as an initial point, with lines running four miles to the north and south, along the Des Moines river, and two miles to the east and west on either bank, but before this could be surveyed and properly laid out and declared, the courts had decided that the so-called "Des Moines grant" extended above Racoon fork to the source of the Des Moines; which decision gave every alternate section to the State of Iowa for internal improvements; thus throwing the post and its buildings beyond the limits of the public domain. There is evidence, however, that Major Woods and his command found few idle moments in the routine of camp duty, in restraining the Indians from their inclinations to depredate the settlements, and in controlling their district, which embraced all the frontier of Iowa from the Des Moines to the Missouri.

On the 25th of June, 1851, by General Orders No. 34, from the Headquarters of the Army, the name of the post was changed to *Fort Dodge*, doubtless in compliment to the Dodges (Gen. Henry and Augustus Caesar), father and son, who at that time were United States senators from the states of Wisconsin and Iowa, and who were among the pioneers of that section. At the same time there were several other forts occupied by troops under the name of Clark or Clarke—one of which had been recently located further west by a company of the 6th Infantry—with the effect of causing no little confusion in the forwarding of mail and supplies.

Several causes operated toward the breaking up of the post which was contemplated at intervals during the whole period of its existence. It was urged that the necessity for the presence of troops in that vicinity was of less importance than at a point further north, and that for all practical pur-

poses the troops at Fort Crawford (Prairie du Chien) were amply sufficient to protect that vicinity. The country was being rapidly settled up, Indian incursions becoming less frequent in this section and more troublesome on the north line of the new purchase from the Sioux in the Minnesota country, where it had been determined to locate one or more strong posts. It was not however until the spring of 1858 that plans were finally adopted by the War Department for the building of the work which was afterwards known as Fort Ridgely, on the Minnesota, when, under date of 16th March, General Clarke was charged with its construction, which was directed to be simultaneous with the breaking up of Forts Scott and Dodge. General Clarke's Order (No. 9) is dated Headquarters 6th Military Department, Jefferson Barracks, Mo., March 30th, 1853, and directs that:

In pursuance of instructions from General Headquarters, Forts Scott and Dodge will be broken up; the garrison of the former will be marched to Fort Leavenworth, and that of the latter by the most practicable route at the earliest moment the season will permit, to the new post on the Minnesota. The Commanding Officer will take immediate measures for carrying this into effect, and for sending to the neighboring posts such of the public property as may be needed at them, and for selling the remainder.

Accordingly, on the 18th April Major Woods left the post with the larger part of the command for the new site on the Minnesota, leaving 2d Lieutenant Corley with twenty men to dispose of the property. On the 2d June, 1853, Lieut. Corley, with the remainder of the troops, marched out of the camp, pulling down the flag from its staff, and before noon that day Fort Dodge as a military post had been wholly abandoned. Such of the buildings as remained, including a steam saw-mill, were disposed of at public sale, the principal purchaser being Mr. William Williams, the late post trader and postmaster, who remained at the site with a view of becoming its owner as soon as the lands could be surveyed and placed on sale. "On the 27th March, 1854," says Prof. Tuttle (page 218), "the first town plat was surveyed on the premises known as the fort site, the land hav-

ing become the property of Major Williams who had made the purchase in January, 1854."

There had been no change in the garrison of the post, from its first occupation until its final abandonment, Company E of the 6th Infantry performing that duty during the whole period. Of the officers Bvt. Maj. Samuel Woods, its first commandant, was also its last. A few years later that officer was transferred to the Pay Department, in which he subsequently reached the rank of colonel and assistant paymaster general, and was retired from active service on the 24th January, 1881, at his own request, having been over forty years in active service. Colonel Woods died September 22, 1887, at Oakland, California.

First Lieutenant and brevet Major Lewis A. Armistead, the second in command and acting assistant quartermaster and commissary of subsistence during the whole period of occupation, reached his captaincy 3rd March, 1855, but together with 2d Lieut. James L. Corley, who joined the command upon the resignation of 2d Lieutenant Tubbs, resigned the service in May, 1861, to cast his lot with the South.

NOTES.

Samuel Woods entered West Point Military Academy, from Indiana, in 1833. He graduated No. 36 in his class of fifty in 1837. His military life was one of great activity and usefulness. He served in the Florida war with the Seminole Indians and was engaged in the battle of Okeechobee, December 25, 1837. He participated in several battles in the Mexican war and was brevetted for gallantry and meritorious conduct at Chapultepec. He afterwards served on the northwestern frontier, and was at Fort Dodge, Iowa, from 1850 to '53.

Lewis A. Armistead was two years at West Point, but never graduated. However, he was appointed 2d Lieutenant in the 6th U. S. Infantry in 1839. He was awarded brevets for gallantry in the battles of Contreras, Churubusco, Molino del Rey and Chapultepec. He resigned from the regular army in 1861, entering the Confederate service in which he became a brigadier general. He was wounded at Antietam. At Gettysburg he was in Pickett's charge, in which he fell mortally wounded and died a prisoner.

James L. Corley entered the military academy in 1846, graduating in 1850. He was promoted to 2d lieutenant in 1851, and to 1st lieutenant in 1855. His service up to 1857 was on the frontiers of Iowa, Kansas and Missouri. He was sent to California in 1858 where he remained in the regular army until 1861, when he resigned to enter the Confederate service. Of his subsequent history we have no record. He died at Norfolk, Va., in 1883, at the age of 54. He was the last army officer in command at Fort Dodge.

Lieutenant John L. Tubbs was not at West Point and we have no record of his civil or military history.

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